UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CONF.85/L.75
22 July 1992

ENGLISH ONLY

SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 25 August-3 September 1992
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FIFTH CONFERENCE

Report of Estonia

Paper submitted by Estonia

---

* E/CONF.85/1/Rev.1.

92-33428 3328i (E) 020892 050892

1. For the first time the Estonian delegation has the honour of participating in a United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. Although since the occupation of Estonia in 1940 she has had no opportunity to take part in international cooperation on these matters, information on the most important principles of the five previous conferences has reached Estonian linguists and geographers through various channels, especially via Finland. The following report gives a review on the situation and recent developments in Estonia. Aspects of standardization, covered in the toponymic guidelines of Estonia (E/CONF.85/L.76), are not repeated here.

2. It should be mentioned at once that since the 1920s the place-names of Estonia have officially been monolingual and almost totally in Estonian, written in the Roman alphabet. Exceptions are names in areas that have been settled by minorities (Swedes, Russians) and some names of cultural or historical value (e.g. Rocca al Mare). In the years of Soviet rule Russian was de facto considered the first official language. The toponyms of Estonia continued to be recognized in their Estonian form, but for Russian use these were transcribed into Cyrillic letters according to officially adopted rules. This led to inevitable distortions. There were no special Russian variants of the names (except for some names of undersea features on sea maps, which are to be revised). The practice of some foreign cartographic enterprises of "transliterating back" Estonian place-names from the Cyrillic transcriptions has never been acceptable in Estonia. Nor is it acceptable to continue to use any of these distorted name forms as exonyms, e.g. "Sarema", "Khiouma" or "Khiuma" instead of correct forms Saaremaa, Hiiumaa. One of the few exceptions in the transcription rules into Russian was the name of the capital Tallinn, which used to be transcribed with one final "n". However, the exception was abolished in 1988 and there is no reason for using "Tallin" as an exonym in lieu of the correct form Tallinn.

National standardization

3. Two major programmes are linked with the standardization of geographical names.

(a) National mapping programmes

4. The National Land Board has started a mapping programme that is aimed at providing the wide public and authorities with large-scale topographic maps in Estonian (see "Toponymic guidelines"). The use of correct name forms is considered important and therefore names on all the maps prepared or licensed by the National Land Board are to be checked by onomasticians. A database of cartographic names, intended as a national database, is being formed at Eesti Maauuringud state enterprise. This is part of a wider project to cover all the information needed for the compilation of maps. Apart from names, other useful information about the named object is included. The work on the datebase is coordinated with that of the basic map (1:20,000) and a map of 1:50,000. Names are registered from various sources and then compared. In field research ambiguous names are checked and new names collected. Use will

also be made of the linguistic collection of toponyms at the Institute of Language and Literature.

(b) Administrative reform

5. In 1990 an administrative reform was started in Estonia. In the first stage, the terms of traditional administrative units were restored, so districts (rajoonid) became counties (maakonnad) and "village soviets" (külanõukogud) are gradually becoming parishes (vallad) as they acquire self-government. Historical names of counties have also been restored (see annex). The second phase of the reform would include the revision of the number and boundaries of parishes and compiling a new list of official village names based on tradition and popular usage.

6. It is obvious that these programmes would need a national names authority to coordinate the efforts of standardizing place-names and to secure the observance of national interests and values in the process. It is hoped that in the first half of 1992 an advisory names committee will be set up in affiliation to a government institution responsible for the administrative reform.

7. Characteristic of the tendencies in recent years has been the movement to restore traditional names of streets, villages etc. Many street names were imposed by the rulers in the post-war period to enforce new communist ideology and Russian cultural expansion. Efforts to remove such names became part of overall political movement towards liberty and independence and this has maintained public attention to names. Names are viewed as an integral part of the cultural heritage. The aim is to preserve as much as possible of the old valuable name-stock and to make the public aware of the importance of names protection.

Exonyms

8. The policy of the Estonian Orthological Committee on the use of foreign names has been one of curbing the use of exonyms. In 1983 the Committee compiled a list of names of countries and their capitals (excluding those using non-Roman script). In the list the number of exonyms was further reduced, especially those that were considered purely orthographic adaptations. Recommendations included e.g. Stockholm (instead of Stokholm), Reykjavík (instead of Reikjavik), Madrid (instead of Madriid), Nicaragua (instead of Nikaraagua), Zimbabwe (instead of Simbabve) etc. Furthermore, the Committee reinstated the principle, accepted in 1976, that no nationally standardized name used in an Estonian text should be considered "a mistake".

9. On the whole the recommendations of the Committee have been followed in the Estonian press and books of reference. Recent changes in names have been caused by political decisions. So names like Moldova, Kõrgõzstan, Côte d'Ivoire, Cabo Verde, Myanmar have come into use instead of Moldaavia, Kirgiisia, Elevandiluurannik, Roheneemesaared, Birma.

10. On the other hand, it is not conidered necessary to curb the use of many traditional exonyms, e.g. the names of most European countries or exonyms for places on neighbouring territories that give evidence of ancient contacts with these places. In accordance with resolution 13 of the Fifth United Nations Conference exonyms will be written in the second place on maps issued in Estonia.

Romanization systems

11. The Estonian Orthological Committee has accepted the principle that if a language using non-Roman script has got an internationally accepted romanization system, it should, after due consideration, be adopted for use in Estonian texts.

12. Chinese names have been written in the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet (Pinyin) as early as the 1960s. The transfer was made easier by publishing a guide where correspondence of Chinese syllables in Russian and Roman (Pinyin) characters was shown.

13. Bulgarian romanization system was recommended by the Committee in 1977 with slight modifications afterwards.

14. No decision has yet been made on the Estonian use of the international romanization system for Russian names, although resolution 18 of the Fifth Conference, which contains the GOST 1983 transliteration table, has been made public and the use of this system is encouraged in contexts other than Estonian.

15. Greek names have been transcribed into Estonian texts according to rules established for the classical Greek language. The new international romanization system will probably be adopted but it would be necessary to determine the number of exonyms or the names still referred in the classical form.

16. Estonia's own transcription rules have been adopted by the Orthological Committee in the 1970s for many of the former Soviet Union's languages (Ukrainian, Belorussian, Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Uzbek, Kyrahz, Tajik, Turkmen). As these languages move to using Roman script the original spellings of the names will automatically be used in Estonian texts also, as has been the case with the names of Moldova.

International cooperation

17. A representative from Estonia participated as an observer in the meeting of the Norden Division, held in Helsinki on 13 March 1992.

18. On 7-8 May 1992 Estonia was host to a regional meeting of the Baltic States on the standardization of geographical names, the first of the kind.

The meeting was attended by linguists and cartographers from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and an observer from Finland. The participants discussed questions of mutual interest and informed one another of the situation in their respective countries. They appealed to their Governments to give adequate attention to the problems of standardizing geographical names. In regard to the forthcoming Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names the participants agreed that for effective regional cooperation a separate Baltic Division should be formed within the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. A resolution on the matter was adopted.

Annex

CHANGES IN THE NAMES OF ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS, 1987-1992

Note. Rural municipalities (parishes) are given without a generic term. Other generic terms used: rajoon, district; linn, town; alev, borough. For the names of counties, see also a note in the annex to the "Toponymic guidelines: Estonia" (E/CONF.85/L.76).

Old name	New name
Alaküla	Räpina
Esna	Kareda
Haapsalu rajoon	Läänemaa
Ihamaru	Kõlleste
Kaagjärve	Karula
Kaarli	Sõmeru
Kingissepa (linn)	Kuressaare (linn)
Kingissepa rajoon	Saaremaa
Kohtla-Järve rajoon	Ida-Virumaa
Linnamäe	Oru
Mehikoorma	Meeksi
Mustajõe	Laheda
Nuia (alev)	Karksi-Nuia
Ollepa	Kabala
Otepää	Pühajärve
Paide rajoon	Järvamaa
Pürksi	Noarootsi
Rakvere rajoon	Lääne-Virumaa
Riidaja	Põdrala

Old name	New name
Sinimäe	Vaivara
Sommerlingi	Rae
Suuremetsa	Orava
Tallinna Kalinini rajoon a/	Tallinna Põhjarajoon
Tallinna Lenini rajoon a/	Tallinna Lõunarajoon
Tallinna Mererajoon a/	Tallinna Idarajoon
Tallinna Oktoobri rajoon a/	Tallinna Läänerajoon

---

a/ Names of the city districts.